

Luke 2:8-14 (NKJV)

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

42-02-15-Hark the Herald Angels Sing
carol, Christmas, shepherds, proclamation, theology

Luke 2:8-14 (NKJV)

It’s astounding to contemplate the marvels of the Christ Child!

INTRODUCTION: (Text as Scripture Reading)

–[**In Dec. 2000**, I wrote a poem on our **text: [It Happened One Night** – It was the fourth watch, and we were alone, / Minding our business and chilled to the bone, / Doing our duty of guarding the sheep, / Each taking turns for a smidgeon of sleep. // Suddenly, there in the dark of the night, / We were engulfed in a radiant light! / Right in those fields of our common routine, / We were caught up in a glorious scene. // Our knees were knocking! All heaven broke out! / Then came an angel who started to shout: / “Don’t be afraid! I have Good News to tell, / Not just for you, but the whole world as well. // “Go to the City of David—not far. / Search in a stable beneath the bright star, / Look in a feeding trough, humble and cold, / There you will find what the prophets foretold: // “Yahweh’s Messiah! The Savior at last / Comes to the Earth! Be no longer downcast!” / Then with the angel an army on high / Sang as they swarmed overhead in the sky, // “Glory to God! To the Lord, highest praise! / Peace in God’s will for the rest of your days!” / Quickly they’d come, and as quickly they fled. / We ran in search of the crude manger-bed. // What a surprise! Amid dung and wet straw, / Animals crowded around what we saw: / Just a small baby, wrapped up in a rag— / Parents asleep on a worn saddlebag. . . . // This was the Savior? Then this was the news! / So we all scattered, this tale to diffuse. / Folks were astounded that such was revealed / To simple, poor shepherds out in the field.] **HOM.idea.**

–What an *astounding* night! But this angelic *good news* had only begun to reveal the *truths* about this “newborn King.” Charles Wesley inserted a few of these in writing, “Hark! how all the **welkin** [*sky; heaven*] rings.” But [**George Whitefield**, who worked with the Wesleys, turned that first line into “Hark the herald angels sing,” and composed the carol’s repeating chorus.] **Many older Christian hymns overflow with doctrinal truth.** Briefly, let’s *harken* to the *truths* Charles Wesley included in this carol, stanza by stanza....

I. Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King:
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

- A. Angelic “*good tidings of great joy which will be to all people*” (**v.10**) told of a newborn Messiah who *by mild mercy* would bring a “peace on earth” where “God and sinners [were] reconciled.” (The Jews expected a Messiah ruling with “a rod of iron,” not a pacifistic teacher-healer.)
- B. But Jesus came to turn *sinners* into *saints*. (His way of “*goodwill to*”

men” in v.14 is still the only way this planet’s *nations rise joyfully* out of *greed, crime, corruption, and other social dysfunctions.*)

TRANS: Hark! the herald angels... proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!” Who is this “Christ,” this *Messiah*? The answer is in v.11, “*For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*” The carol’s 2nd verse gives more depth to the angelic answer, making it even more **astounding to contemplate the marvels of the Christ Child.**

II. Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!

Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the Virgin’s womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th’incarnate Deity,

Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.

- A. Who is this “Christ, by highest heaven **adored** [OFr, to worship]”—Heb 1:6, ... when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” (Angels say, “Christ the Lord” (v.11); Wesley expands it: “Christ, the **everlasting** Lord!” because *angels worship only Deity.*)
- B. “Veiled in flesh the Godhead” is now visible; “Deity” is “incarnate”; God is “pleased” to become “man” and “dwell” with us as “our Emmanuel”—John 1:14, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (Isa 7:14 is now fulfilled by Mat 1:23, “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”)
- C. God’s oldest prophecy was also being fulfilled—Gen 3:15, And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (This “Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” is that “Offspring of the Virgin’s womb” born after thousands of years [“late in time”] to “crush” the “head” of Satan, to whom the Bible’s first prophetic promise was given.)

TRANS: It’s **astounding to contemplate the Christ Child!** I never tire of talking about the Incarnation. It still blows my mind whenever I try to ponder its depths. Yet, the purpose for the embodiment of “the Godhead,” the reason for “Emmanuel... ‘God with us,’” was to give to the lost human race “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” And we’re to “hail” Him...

III. Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings. [first half of stanza]

- A. [“Hail” is an old word for *praise*.] We don’t praise peace itself but “hail

the heav’n-born Prince of Peace” behind it. (*Peace with God by our sins being forgiven* only begins what the “Prince of Peace” wants to do in us: Jesus wants to make us children of peace and of forgiveness.)

- B. “Hail the Sun [s-u-n] of Righteousness!” not because “Light and life to all He brings” as our solar star does, but because He is “Risen with healing in His wings,” as in the OT Messianic prophecy—Mal 4:2, But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (Jesus shines *His light*, revealing our need for healing, then gives *His life*, bringing our lives healing renewal and release from bondage.)

CONCLUSION:

—Now the rest of stanza 3 and the chorus: “**Mild** He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die; / Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth. / Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”

—“mild” is used *twice* in this carol, highlighting the nature of Christ’s 1st Advent (in contrast to the *rod-of-iron* nature that will be a necessity in His 2nd Advent). This 1st Advent, God became a tiny, helpless “Babe... lying in a manger.” He was born *humbly* and would die *humbly* but would be raised *powerfully*, so that He could “raise” us and *free us from death*. —He was “born to give [us] second birth.” And we celebrate His birth just as *an old year dies and a new one begins*. What an apt illustration of how our old life has been born again! And what a great opportunity—as the New Year approaches—for us to join our voices with those of the multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*”